

Tri Swim Coach
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Kicking: With or Without a Board?

By Kevin Koskella, Tri Swim Coach



In freestyle, it is important to have some kind of kick to help you rotate from side to side as you swim, and to give you a small bit of propulsion. However, 90-95% of your propulsion in swimming will come from your upper body and how much you can rotate to slide through the water. So why do we see so many swimmers out there working on strengthening their legs by kicking with kickboards that keep them afloat? Perhaps it's because:

- They like to chat with their friends while apparently doing a workout
- They often sink while swimming and holding a kickboard makes them feel more comfortable in the water
- They want to strengthen their quad muscles in the hopes of improving their swimming speed

Each of these reasons is understandable, but highly unnecessary! Here's why:

- Chatting while kicking with a board is fun, social, and does serve that purpose. In fact, I occasionally allow my Masters swimmers to have a "social kick" where the sole purpose is to get to know their fellow lanemates and teammates. However, this is not a workout and won't do anything for your swimming abilities.

- If you are sinking and enjoy being propped up on top of the water with a floatation device, that's a sign that you need *more* practice kicking on your side, without a board. The kickboard will only act as a crutch in this case, halting you from improvement.
- Strength in the legs plays only a tiny role in swimming faster. Therefore, grinding out kicking sets with a board in the hopes of building strong thigh muscles is not an efficient way of improving your swim stroke.

The other very important reason to use a kickboard as seldom as possible is that in freestyle, we are never supposed to be on our front anyway! Freestyle should be swum rotating from side to side, not on your stomach. Therefore, it makes much more sense to perform your kicking sets on your side with one hand extended- just the way your body position should be in freestyle.

STROKE TIP #2: Keep looking straight down when swimming freestyle. It's important to keep your head down with only a small part of the back of your head out of the water. Also, as you rotate through the water, try not to move your head with the rest of your body rotation.

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